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ABSTRACT

The League of Schools Reaching Out is a national project to show how family/community/school partnerships can contribute significantly to school restructuring. It aims to increase the academic and social success of all children, especially those society labels as at risk. The league is attempting to expand the notion that the internal methods, like decision making and staff development, are not an exclusive ingredient to school reform efforts. It adopts an ecological approach where multiple institutions and sectors are responsible for the child's success. The league draws on research and project reports and past and current parallel efforts of other organizations and researchers. This includes Comer's school development process, Levin's Accelerated Schools Program, and Epstein's typology of parent/school collaboration. Four broad categories of school activity identified are: (1) helping families at home; (2) helping and using parents at school; (3) establishing partnerships and exchanges between schools and other community agencies and institutions; and (4) eliciting the participation of parents and other community members in school-based policy and decision making. Examples of each category are cited. Briefly elaborated upon is the league's strategy--eight core ideas about a national multisite process for school reform. (RR)

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IMPLEMENTING A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL REFORM THROUGH FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: THE LEAGUE OF SCHOOLS REACHING OUT

by Don Davies

An invited address prepared for the annual meeting of the School Psychology Division of the American Psychology Association, San Francisco, August 17, 1991.

For the better part of four decades I have been an observer of and a participant in successive waves of educational reform trying to make American society and American schools more equitable, responsive, and productive.

I have been a reformee as a teacher in school and college classrooms, a grantor of funds from the Federal government to stimulate schools and universities to change, a teachers union official encouraging teachers to initiate substantial reforms from the inside, the director of a parent and citizen advocacy organization promoting reform, and most recently the director of a Federally-funded center seeking to put good research and development ammunition in the hands of those who want to mobilize parents, community people, and teachers to join forces to promote the social and academic success of all children.

Don Davies is co-director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning in the School of Education at Boston University and President of the Institute for Responsive Education.

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Comstock Parent and Community Involvement Programs in Six Categories

I. **School Help for Families**

* parent education workshops and GED and ESL classes
* the Parent Resource Center
* home visits by parent outreach workers
* health and human service referrals
* in-school pre-school day care provided by the YMCA.

II. **School-Home Communication**

* parent-teacher conferences
* regular report cards
* open houses
* parent handbook
* an activity calendar
* communication in Spanish (and in some cases Haitian Creole) as well as English
* Dial-a-Teacher program and student homework club (by telephone and on cable TV)

III. **Family Help for the School and for Teachers**

* Parent Cooperative program in selected classrooms
* classroom volunteers
* parent assistance with field trips
* parent association fund raising
* several tutoring projects

IV. **Family Involvement in Learning Activities at Home**

* PEARLS, which provides teacher and commercially prepared lessons and games for parents to use at home
* parent checking of homework
* reinforcement of home teaching activities by home visitors

V. **Involvement in Governance and Advocacy**

* Comstock PTA
* School Advisory Committee
* bilingual parent advisory committee
* parent participation in planning and evaluation of funded projects such as the parent outreach program

VI. **Collaboration and Exchanges with the Community**

* participation in Dade Partners (partnerships with YMCA which provides an after-school care program at the school for 120

Sprinkled through these years have been many failures, large and small -- and some successes -- many grounds for pessimism and despair about how difficult and slow institutional and social change are - but also some grounds for continued optimism and some tangible and important achievements.

But, I am not ready to write my memoirs about all of these years, to attempt a grand summing up, or to offer a valedictory. In fact, I will wait to sum up until I can include the history of our newest reform effort -- the League of Schools Reaching Out. In this paper I will talk about the ideological roots of the League and discuss briefly some of the elements of the strategy that the Institute for Responsive Education is using.

<u>What is the League of Schools Reaching Out?</u>

The League is a national project of the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE). It is also a part of the new research and development Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning. This new Family Center is one of the 25 national R&D centers funded by the Office of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The Family Center is a consortium including Boston University, University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana), Johns Hopkins, Yale, Wheelock College, and the Institute for Responsive Education. The League is a national strategy to seek to show how family/community/school partnerships can contribute significantly to school restructuring or reform aimed directly at increasing the academic and social success of all children, especially those the society labels as at-risk.

The League is a network of schools which was begun in the spring of 1990 with a national videoconference beamed from Boston to twenty mini-conferences across the country and carried live by the Learning Channel. It now has 63 schools in 20 states, plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. Most are urban public schools, with a small number of private schools and a few rural schools in poverty areas. Most are elementary schools, but there are several at the early learning pre-school level, some middle schools, and three or four high schools.

All are schools that serve a substantial number of low-income children. Schools became members by submitting a written application -- using a form which IRE provided -- prepared by a group of key people in the school -- principal, parents, teachers, and representatives of other community agencies.

<u>How is the League supported?</u>

Funds have been obtained from several foundations for a three year project: the three primary supporters of the national effort are the Pew Charitable Trusts, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Funds for a cluster of schools in New York City come from the Aaron Diamond Foundation and the Leon Lowenstein Foundation. Important initial support also was given by the Plan for Social Excellence -- and their Excellent Beginnings program. The Boston Globe Foundation is supporting part of the work of the cluster in Boston, Cambridge, and Chelsea.

Support in terms of research, evaluation, and publications also

comes from the Federal funds for the Family R&D Center. The League members will be significant users of the Center's reports and in many cases will provide data and serve as sites for Center studies.

What does the League seek to do?

We are forming this national network of schools to show policymakers, opinion shapers, and educators across the country how family and community partnerships can be a part of school redesign, reform, or restructuring. (Choose your own preferred jargon.) Much of what is called restructuring these days is focused on schedules, calendars, organization, management changes, new decision-making councils, staff development, individualized curriculum and instruction, and imaginative use of new technology. The proposed changes are primarily inside the school. Many are very promising and deserve support, but I believe that they simply can't make a dent on the enormous intertwined problems of poverty, social disarray, and educational failure. Only an ecological approach is likely to make a major difference in assuring the social and academic success of those hundreds of thousands of children who are most at risk today -- children of color, children who are poor and from socially marginal families both urban and rural, children whose families are immigrants or whose primary language is not English, children whose potential is being undeveloped because of various kinds of disabilities.

Schools, families, communities, organizations and agencies (including government, businesses and financial institutions, churches, civic organizations, community organizations, post-

secondary educational institutions) are all part of the problem -- the social and academic failure of from one quarter to one third of our urban children and the staggering social and economic problems of poor families and communities, both urban and rural. And, they all must be part of the solution -- through collaborative planning and coordinated programming -- through partnerships, through a new social contract for children.

This is what we mean by an ecological approach. A child's world is composed of multiple institutions and sectors -- family, day care center or school, neighborhood, community organizations, churches, employers, unions, governments. All parts of the this world influence the social, physical, emotional, spiritual, and academic development of the child. These influences are more likely to be strong and positive when there is communication and cooperation in the child's interest among the many parts. As with a physical ecosystem, what happens in one part of the child's ecology affects the child and affects the other parts or subsystems as well. The children and their successes and failures influence all of the parts of their ecosystem.

And, yet we know that for many children -- including large numbers of those we typically label as at-risk -- the connections among the parts of the child's ecosystem are often not very good, sometimes working at cross purposes. These poor disconnections appear to contribute to the social and academic failure of many children.

This way of diagnosing today's high rates of failure -- in school and out -- leads quite naturally to an ecological remedy which is

at the heart of the League's approach. In short, the League of Schools Reaching Out is an alternative approach to school reform and restructuring. It is designed to show -- in a variety of real schools and communities from coast to coast -- the potential effectiveness of a comprehensive, ecological approach to restructuring or redesign in which school reform is directly linked to family and community factors and recognizes the interconnectedness between the education of children and health, housing, economic, and social conditions.

The League's Roots

The idea for the League has two important roots.

First, IRE's two year Schools Reaching Out Project which has been abundantly reported in a series of research and project reports (Brooks and Sussman, 1990; Davies, 1990; Heleen, 1990; Jackson 1990; Johnson 1990, Krasnow, 1990, Equity and Choice, Spring 1990 and in a 1991 AERA Schools Reaching Out symposium.)

This project produced a rich vein of learnings about the process and results when schools reach out, about strategies for change within schools, and about how "third-party" reform organizations such as IRE can best contribute to school changes. We have built these learnings into the design of the League and will continue to draw on these reports as the project becomes fully implemented in the coming months.

Second, we draw on the past and current parallel efforts of other organizations and researchers. Most specifically, James Comer's

school development process which has now been extended to dozens of schools across the country. Comer's work emphasizes the connections between all aspects of the child's development -- physical, emotional, and cognitive and provides direct support for children in all of these aspects. Comer also insists that families must be involved in decision-making and school governance and not be seen as the passive beneficiaries of the decisions of others. We also draw on the work of Henry Levin and the Accelerated Schools Program which has expanded from two pilot schools in the San Francisco Bay Area to several other parts of the country. Schools in the Accelerated School network seek to speed up rather than slow down the learning process for at-risk children and involve teachers and parents in decision-making. We also draw on the extensive studies of Joyce Epstein who points to the key role of classroom teachers in school links with families and has developed a five part typology of parent/school collaboration. From both Epstein and Dorothy Rich's Home School Institute we borrow ideas and materials to help parents become more effective teachers of their own children at home. We also have been influenced importantly by the work of Moncreiff Cochran who sees parent empowerment as a core purpose and who bases his work on the belief that all families have strengths as well as problems and that cultural diversity can be a resource not a liability.

We owe an intellectual debt to David Seeley, who in his book Education through Partnership calls for a new vision of education in which responsibility for the development and success of all

children is shared by school, students, family, and community. These are some of the major influences on the development of the League of Schools Reaching Out strategy. But, all of the individual schools have their own local and special inspirations and sources of ideas.

What are we trying to do?

We know that a new definition of parent involvement is needed. That is why we are using the term family --instead of parents -- to reflect the fact that the traditional father at work -- mother at home -- two children in school -- pattern now only holds for happens less than 10 per cent of children in school. Many other people are often involved with caring for children -- grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, foster parents, neighbors.

We are also trying to show that parent involvement has to mean more than coming to meetings in the school. It has to reach into the homes, and it has to reach those families that are not well connected with the school, those who educators often refer to as hard-to-reach. The new definition also means that both the families and schools need help from community agencies and resources. Poor, stressed families can't make it without some help, any more than schools can be expected to shoulder all these burdens by themselves, which is why we have adopted as a theme an old African saying -- It takes the Whole Village to Educate the Child.

It takes new kinds of structures, mechanisms, plans, and partnership agreements to give this new definition and theme some meaning in the real world.

What are the schools actually doing?

We are currently completing the analysis of a survey of all of the League schools which we will publish in a Family Center Report in November. The survey shows that four categories of activity seem to be especially promising:

I. FIRST. There are activities where schools are helping families at home and in the community with their basic obligations of child rearing as well as meeting their own and their families' basic needs and interests.

Some examples from our survey: The Comstock School in Miami is working in close partnership with the neighborhood social service agency to provide direct services to both children and the adult members of their families. The staff of the area clinic works closely with the school counselor and the parent support workers who visit homes and make referrals. In Washington D.C. at the Shaed School an instructor from nearby Trinity College teaches reading at home to low reading skilled family members and their young children. In Chelsea near Boston the Early Learning Center is proud of their CHIP program which sends home visitors to families homes with reading materials and help for parents on how to promote the language development of their children.

These examples point to the importance of helping families contribute more effectively to their own children's development.

Sometimes this means helping them learn how to teach reading or supervise homework; sometimes it means helping meet their own basic needs for counseling, health services, or help with problems about housing and employment.

There is a beginning national trend toward providing these kinds of varied Family Support services -- with schools playing either a coordinating or a referral role. There is also a beginning but potentially significant trend toward starting Family Support interventions very early -- during pregnancy and when the children are infants and toddlers. But both state and local policies and funding are lagging far behind the need.

II. The second kinds of activity that our survey is revealing are those that happen in the school -- either to serve parents or in which family members help the school.

Almost half of out 63 schools have established some kind of Parent or Family Center - a space in the school which is the hub of family activities and services. Examples: The Family Room at Community School 92 in the South Bronx which is located near the school's entrance to provide a welcoming place for parents and others who visit the school -- with coffee and cookies, a day care room for toddlers, and a wide variety of classes and workshops developed on topics which the family members suggest.

In most League schools family members are helping the school in many ways: The Valencia Park School in San Diego has contracts with parents to share responsibility for getting children to school on time. At the Miles Park Elementary School in Cleveland

six parent workers paid for by Chapter 1 money are in the school all day every day working to help teachers and assist parents and children in a wide variety of ways. A lot of emphasis is put on informing parents about the school curriculum at each grade level and how children can help their own children's learning.

Many of the schools have enlisted family members to be tutors and classroom volunteers; many are stepping up their efforts to communicate with parents through newsletters, open houses, through parent education and other kinds of workshops in the school.

Our survey shows an important theme in these reaching out schools -- providing a wide and diverse menu of activities aimed specifically at different segments of the school's parent community -- both for those whose time is very limited and those who want to be activists in a variety of ways. Some schools and parent leaders are learning a lesson from magazine publishers and developing programs designed for a particular market niche rather than assuming a "one size of activity fits all" attitude. This trend reflects the growing diversity of America's urban communities and family patterns.

III. The third category of promising activities showing up in our survey includes partnerships and exchanges between schools and other community agencies and institutions. There are many examples: a hospital provides an infant and toddler care facility; a community organization offers a Big Sister program for a pregnant teen; a business provides tutors; an African-American

civic organization arranges for mentors for black boys.

At the Miles Park School in Cleveland a dozen laid-off workers from a nearby Ford Motor plant are working in the school as tutors, helping teachers, and working with parents on a variety of projects. A local church is offering courses in self-esteem to students in the school. Young adults in the community are being trained to be the instructors in this program.

The Fairfield Court Elementary School in Richmond Virginia has a comprehensive early education program which integrates social services, parent education, child care for infants and toddlers, literacy and other adult education programs for family members. The Girl Scouts and Redevelopment and Housing Authority use the school as a meeting place; the principal serves on the Board of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.

One of the most important national trends -- reflected to some extent in these examples from our League -- is that toward collaborative agreements between schools and other human services agencies -- hospitals, health centers, libraries, early childhood programs, social service agencies, settlement houses, community-based organizations to provide services, training, and help for students, for families, and, often, for teachers and other school staff as well.

Federal legislation has been proposed to stimulate and support this kind of activity and several states -- including Kentucky -- are making policy changes to encourage this kind of school-community partnership. Kentucky, as a part of their broad school

reform effort, will establish 125 to 150 Family Resource and Youth Service Centers next fall -- in or near schools serving low income families. These centers will provide or coordinate existing resources for preschool care, school-age child care, crisis counseling, health services, employment counseling, and referrals for human services.

None of this is easy, and it won't be cheap. This collaborative or partnership approach flies in the face of the traditional isolation of schools and other community agencies one from the other and the traditional turf wars between agencies that leave children and their families falling through the cracks.

I believe that schools and school systems should be the ones to reach out to break down this isolation, not to do it all or pay for it all but to be the catalyst to be sure that partnerships are set up. Specialists such as school psychologists should be able to play important leadership roles.

IV. Fourth. The fourth kind of activity that is reported in our survey as another vital part of family-school-community partnership is the participation of parents and other community members in school-based policy and decisionmaking or participation in community organizations which are advocating for the interests of children or pressing the schools to change.

Here the work being done in San Diego and Miami to develop school based management/shared decisionmaking is an important example as are school advisory committees and school councils, including importantly the new school site councils in all Chicago public

schools. The Chicago councils are like mini-school boards with authority for curriculum decisions, for hiring and firing the principal, and for the school budget except for personnel costs.

None of the other kinds of family-school-community partnerships I have been talking about today -- family support and parent education programs, community resources for schools, family centers, home visitor programs, efforts to help families contribute better to the education of their own children-- take the place of or conflict with having parents participate much more actively and effectively in making school policies or decisions about their children's schools. In a democratic society parents, regardless of income or education level, have a right to influence decisions about all of the society's institutions that influence their lives, most certainly and especially including the schools.

I believe that the different kinds of parent or family involvement reinforce each other. More parents will be interested in spending time on decision-making councils or advisory committees when these groups have some real authority, as is true in Chicago's new school reform plan where the local school councils have a majority of parent members.

However, in our survey only about a third of the League schools report that they have active and effective school councils. This finding reflects the continuing resistance on the part of school administrators and teachers and their unions to allowing a powerful role for parents in making decisions and setting

policies.

What is needed, most of all is a new way of thinking that the schools, families, and communities have a shared and overlapping responsibility for children, a responsibility that can best be exercised if the various parts of the child's world communicate.

What is our strategy for change?

The Institute for Responsive Education has sought schools which find the League's ideas and approaches attractive and see some direct benefits coming from their participation. They are volunteers. IRE provides little if any direct funding but offers information, technical assistance, research reports and other publications, recognition, and opportunities for competing for grants. IRE expects the schools to offer sites for studies, willingly exchange information and ideas with other members, document and report on their work, and to find ways to use the reports and materials produced by IRE and the Family Center. The League needs to be seen and assessed both as a national network and reform strategy and a collection of individual schools implementing their own plans for increasing student success through family-community-school collaboration.

<u>What is the League's Strategy?</u>

As I see it, IRE's strategy for a national network of reform-oriented schools is based on eight core ideas about a national, multi-site strategy for school reform. There is not time in this paper to offer detailed comments about this strategy. (These are available in another paper I have presented at the 1991 AERA

meeting.) But, I want briefly to talk about the main elements of the strategy.

1. <u>IDEOLOGY -- There is a need for a clear and compelling ideology.</u>

IRE seeks to imbue the League overall and its member schools with two ideas that are, in fact, an ethos, an ideology, or, if you will, an orthodoxy.

** That all children can learn and achieve social and academic success, including those children that are considered most at-risk, least likely to succeed. This is a radical and a powerful idea which challenges the conventional belief in many American schools that some students (often a substantial percentage) are destined not to "make it" to benefit little from the school's offerings because of the characteristics of their families or communities and the own perceived disabilities and deficits, such as lack of motivation, laziness, or a temperaments unsuited to academic work.

** That such an ambitious goal as success for all children can only be achieved through the combined and coordinated efforts of school staff, families, and other community agencies and resources.

But such an ideology, however clear and compelling, will not be very powerful part of a reform strategy if it is not "owned" by substantial numbers of teachers, administrators, parents, and community representatives in the League schools.

2. FELT NEED -- The participants feel a need for change.

The need is felt by the outside intervenor or a district superintendent; the schools often respond because they must. The results are often disappointing when there is not a common agreement that there is something wrong that needs to be fixed. The schools that are most likely to be successful are those in which the felt need is broadly owned and where substantial numbers of teachers, staff, parents, and other community members can agree on the nature of the problems and needs to be addressed.

3. Plan of Action -- There is a need for an action plan with appropriate and do-able technology.

Ideology and an agreement about the need to change are not enough. A national strategy such as the League must provide participating schools with clear direction about what to do as well as how to do. For the League schools we suggest a broad and comprehensive approach providing a wide range of kinds of family and community collaboration. But, more specifically we suggest three key mechanisms: a parent center; home visitors or parent support workers; and teacher action research teams and teacher mini-grants. (Davies 1990, Krasnow 1990).

In order to provide specific help on how to do it we are going to prepare a League Tool-kit or resource book which will provide step-by-step advice on how to proceed to set up a parent center, for example, with examples from our own project and other League schools.

Through an annotated the League Directory, members can discover which school are implementing which kinds of programming and seek help directly from their peers.

4. ON SITE HELP. There must be outside help available on a regular basis. Skilled and committed field staff are a central part of IRE's strategy. We are about to engage and train a crew of experienced facilitators on a part-time basis. A facilitator will spend about one day a week in each school that is implementing a funded project.

5. RECOGNITION AND VISIBILITY

We are seeking a variety of ways to gain visibility for the project nationally and for each of the member schools and to recognize and reward principals, teachers, and parents. School staff typically receive little visibility and few special awards. We will have a series of national cash awards for individuals and will sponsor a second national videoconference in October 1992 which provide some national visibility.

6. DISCRETIONARY MONEY We have learned that small amount of outside discretionary money can go a long way if two conditions obtain: 1) the money is used as leverage to obtain other funding e.g. use of foundation money to leverage Chapter 1 money for a family support program; 2) the money is made available free from the usual district bureaucratic delays and red-tape. We are providing small grants to about 12 of the League schools to carry out an evaluate aspects of their program. For the others, we

offer help with fundraising.

7. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

There is growing consensus about the value and benefits of the kinds of partnership activities going on in League schools. But, there is a great need for evidence about what kinds of interventions work under what conditions. This fall we will begin three year action research studies in 15 of the League schools. In each we will describe the policy context, work with the staff to describe the intervention and document its implementation, and to assess its results in terms of children's learning and parent and school staff attitudes. We will use both outside researchers and small school based action research teams of parents and teachers which will be organized by our field facilitators.

8. LOVING CRITICS

Years ago John Gardner pointed out that society's institutions are threatened from two sides, by unloving critics who would attack and destroy the institutions and by uncritical lovers who would smother the institutions in a overly-protective, unquestioning embrace. He said that society needs "loving critics." That concept is the way that IRE sees its relationships to the schools. We believe that researchers and third-party intervenors should approach schools with a caring and constructive attitude that is strongly informed by a recognition of schools as complex political institutions. But, they also must, to be consistent with the "loving critic" idea, identify flaws in policy and practice that

stand in the way of progress for the school and the families and children it serves.

However, we must be able to assess and diagnose in a straight-forward and tough-minded way at the same time as they approach the task with caring, patience, and understanding of political and institutional realities.

Final Comments

I have high hopes for success. My optimism is buoyed every time I visit or hear from one of the League schools and am reminded of what exciting and imaginative things are happening. But, my optimism is tempered by every example that is reported of how the bureaucracies and traditions of state and local school and social service systems get in the way of grassroots efforts or how financial crises threaten the morale and staffing of these fledgling efforts.

I view the League as one part of a national and international movement for educational reform and school and social service restructuring. Whether our reform project will sink or swim will be strongly influenced by whether the society's leadership has the political will and skill to attack in a sustained way the intertwined problems of poverty, housing, social service, health, and education which we face.

If the kind of leadership, money, technology, and national resolve that was summoned for the war in the Persian Gulf can be brought to bear on these domestic problems then our chances for success

are very good. If this doesn't happen, in this project and it others like it we will be rowing against the tide. Should we wait for the tide to turn? I don't think so. Thousands of educators, specialists such as yourselves, families, and communities involved in our League are already sweating and rowing, seeking successes and progress where they can be found. As more and more individuals and communities join in, they may become the tide, the new movement that might finally arrest the maelstrom of educational inequity and social instability. At least it is worth a try.

I really like the slogan -- IT TAKES THE WHOLE VILLAGE TO EDUCATE A CHILD -- but it will take a lot of courage and a lot of leadership to break through our institutional and bureaucratic barriers to begin to give some reality to such an idea. Perhaps some of this leadership can come school psychologists.